

A. M I T Y A Y E V



GRISHKA AND THE ASTRONAUT



Progress Publishers
Moscow



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On the planet Earth there was a country, and in that country was a city, and in that city there lived a little boy named Grishka. He was a mischief-maker and he loved to fight – in fact, he was the naughtiest little boy on Earth. He didn't listen to grown-ups and he picked on kids who were younger than he was. That's why they didn't call him Greg or Gregg, but Grishka.

One day Grishka went out into the yard and saw a little girl named Marina riding on her tricycle. Grishka knocked her off the tricycle, got on himself, and started peddling through the puddles on the walk. Everywhere he rode the spray flew up. He was having a lot of fun, and he started singing:

*When Grishka hits you with a thump
Right there you get a great big lump!
Right there you get a great big lump
When Grishka hits you with a thump!*



And so he cycled back and forth, singing his song without beginning or end, and when he finally got tired of singing and cycling, he left the tricycle in the middle of a puddle. What did he care, the naughty boy! He had rubber boots on! He walked through the puddle to where it was dry, and there he stood, waiting to see Marina step into the water in her shoes to get her tricycle back.

Marina didn't want to get her shoes muddied, so she first brought a brick, and then a little board, so she could make a bridge. But just when Marina finished making the bridge, Grishka rolled the tricycle into another puddle.

Marina was so upset she burst into tears, but Grishka merely laughed. Just then Vanya, the boy who lived next door, came out. He grabbed Grishka by the scruff of the neck and said:

"O. K., Grishka, bring that cycle back right this second. And don't think you can run away. I'll catch up with you, and then you'll really get it!"

Vanya wasn't any taller than Grishka, and he wasn't any older either, but Grishka got scared, and without another word, he walked into the puddle.

While he was bringing the cycle back to Marina, all the girls in the neighbourhood gathered around to look at this strange sight. And there were twenty of them. And all twenty started laughing with delight

to see the naughty boy punished. Not only did they laugh, they also stuck out their tongues at him and made monkey faces.

Grishka was so ashamed that he ran upstairs to the attic and sat there for a long, long time, thinking up ways to get revenge on Marina's defender.

"I'll give him such a flip that he'll land plop in the puddle, and the water'll splash higher than the top of the apartment house!"

"Or I'll catch him in the elevator and wreck something so he'll be stuck inside for a whole week."

"Or even better, I'll order the German shepherd next door to knock him to the ground, the way they catch guys at the border, and pin him down with his front paws...."

Each revenge that Grishka thought up was more terrible than the last. But soon he had to admit to himself that he could never do all these super things he had thought up all by himself. Even if he gave the dog next door a piece of baloney it would never obey his command. And if he wrecked something in the elevator it would be worse for him than anybody else, because he lived on the top floor. He could, of course, try to trip Vanya into the puddle, but more likely than not *he* would be the one to end up swimming. Yes, his enemy was clever, all right. But if he, Grishka, were extra strong, then things would be different! Then he could really do something!



GRISHKA GOES TO SEE THE ASTRONAUT

In the same city, on the same street where Grishka lived, there also lived an astronaut. Like all astronauts, he was kind, and when anybody asked for help or advice, he was always sure to give it. The kids in the city would come to visit him when they wanted to hear his stories, or have some tea and cookies, or just play with blocks with him. He would also teach the kids how to go to sleep as soon as they got into bed. Some kids toss and turn and whine and want to hear a story and can never go to sleep. But when an astronaut in a spaceship gets a command from Earth to go to sleep, he does right away. And that's what the astronaut taught the kids to do.

"That astronaut can do just about anything," said Grishka to himself as he sat in the attic. "He could probably make me strong. I think I'll drop in on him."

And so Grishka went to see the astronaut. The astronaut led him into his office, gave him a seat, and asked him:

"What brings you here, Gregory? Maybe you'd like a cup of tea? Or maybe you'd like to see all my medals, and touch them? I'll put the kettle on right now, and here are the medals in my desk drawer. Or maybe you've got something else in mind?"

Grishka looked at all the medals. He touched them with his finger and hemmed and fidgeted.

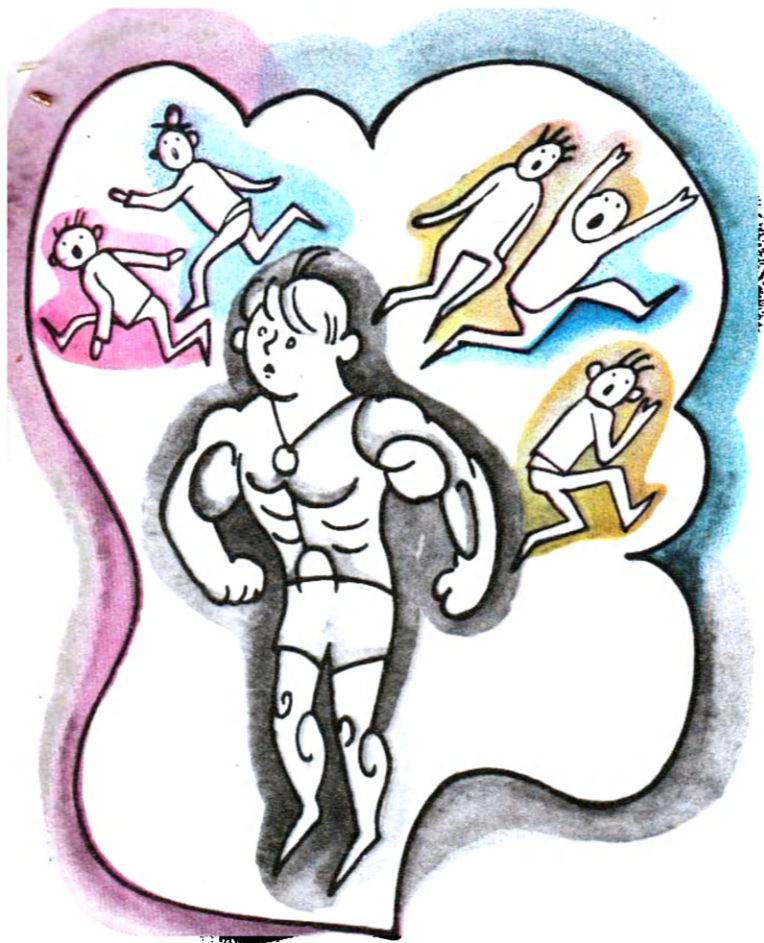
"There's something else," mumbled Grishka. He plucked up his courage. "They say that you can do everything. Is that so?"

"That's right," the astronaut answered, which made Grishka very happy.

"Then make me strong!" he said. "Make me so strong that ... that ... that I don't know what!!"

"O. K. I'll help you," the astronaut agreed. "But tell me, why is it that you want to be so terribly strong?"

"It's because I want to beat up Vanya. He made a fool of me



in front of all the girls. They laughed and made monkey faces at me.”

“Now I get you,” said the astronaut sadly. “Now I understand. You know, I don’t like boys who fight all the time. But I’m a man of my word. I promised I would make you strong, and I will. Here’s a special pass that will get you into the launch site. Take my spaceship and fly off to the moon to find strength. If you don’t feel strong enough there, you can fly on to the nearest asteroid. But make sure you don’t get lost in space. Here’s a map – the route is marked out on it. Remember, though, that on either side of the moon there are two other moons. They’re big, like Earth. And we can’t see them because they’re made of dust. There’s nothing you can do on a moon made of dust.”

“What do you mean, nothing to do?” asked Grishka. “Are you afraid that the spaceship will get dusty? I’ll clean it when I return.”

“No, that’s not the point,” the astronaut laughed. “You could fly right through a moon like that and you wouldn’t even notice it. So don’t waste your rocket fuel. Well, have a good trip!”





GRISHKA TAKES OFF FROM EARTH

Grishka was so happy he couldn't believe it. He ran all the way to the launch site, worrying all the while that the astronaut would change his mind, take away the pass, and maybe even give him a good scolding for being so naughty. But no, nobody stopped him on the way, and members of the ground crew at the launch site were kind and respectful when they met him. They helped Grishka put on his spacesuit and get into the spaceship, and, as was the custom, wished him a happy homecoming and a soft landing.

The engines were turned on. The rocket tore away from the concrete pad and lifted off from Earth. Through the porthole window Grishka saw the tops of poplar trees and crow nests flash by. "There goes the first story," Grishka made a note to himself.

When it reached the second story of the sky, the spaceship passed a flock of swifts. Swifts fly high and fast, but spaceships fly even higher and swifter! And soon they were left behind.

A blue cloud filled the third story of the sky. Rain was falling all around. But not for long. The rocket rose up above the rain, and soon snowflakes were swirling past the porthole. A regular blizzard! So that's it! The rain begins with snow. It's freezing cold under the clouds. Only when they enter the warm air of Earth itself do these icy crystals melt and become droplets of water.

When the rocket was in the very middle of the cloud, a bright blue light filled the cabin of the spaceship. That was lightning flashing not far off. But Grishka didn't hear the thunder – the rocket engines thundered more thunderously than thunder!

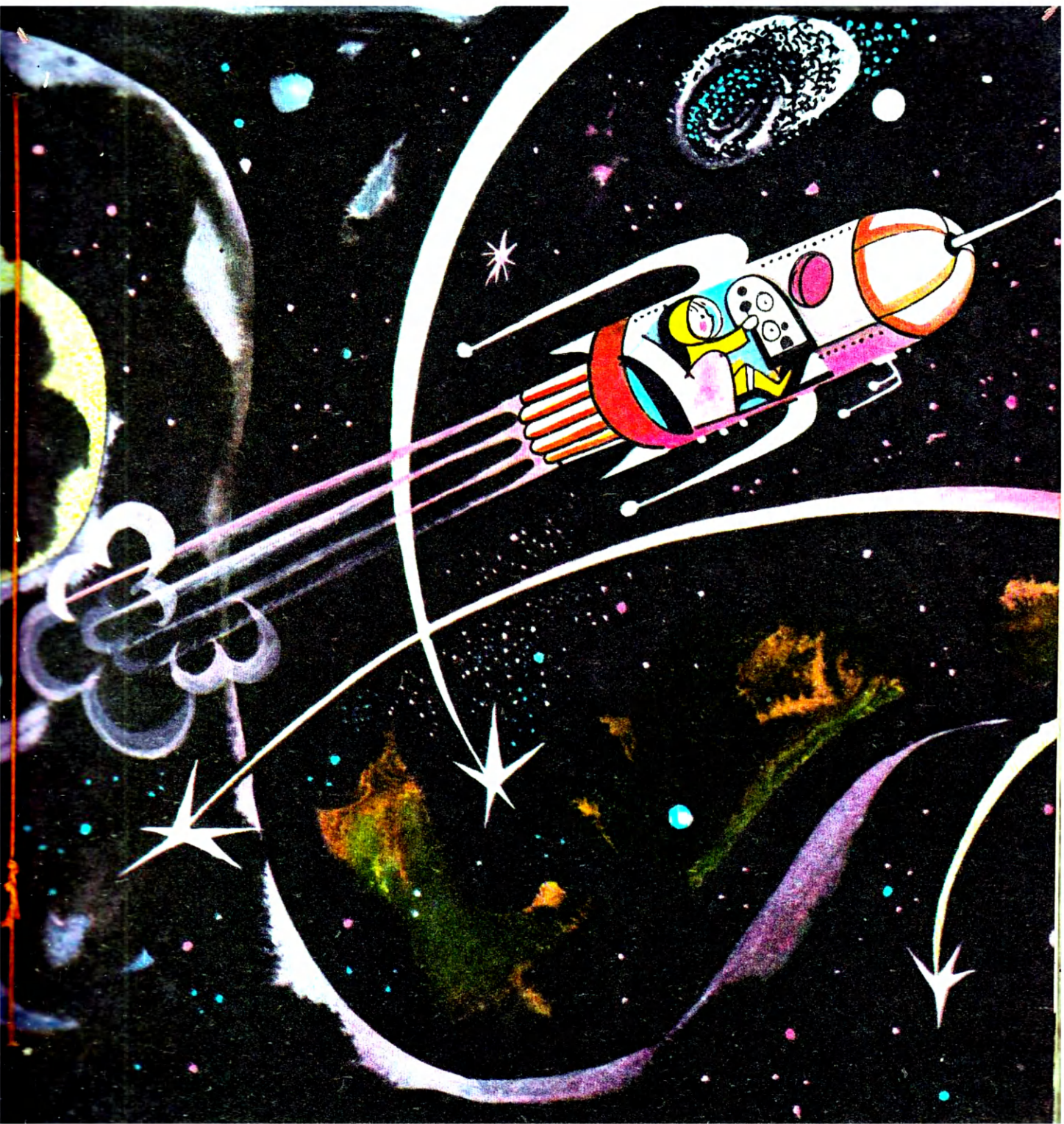
And then the cloud was also beneath him. It hung over the Earth like a strip of white felt. It was also like a field in winter covered with snowdrifts. Grishka even thought that in a second or two he would see a bunch of skiers coming out from behind that white hill. Or maybe a horse harnessed to a sleigh....

That couldn't happen, of course. But then on the fourth story of the sky, above the clouds, flew a big jet plane. Grishka waved to it. And then the plane, like the poplar trees and the birds and the cloud, was left behind.

And above was the sun shining bright. Nothing interfered with it now, nothing stood in its way, because this was the frontier of outer space. Only the pale yellow circle of the Moon was visible to one side of the sun. Grishka's rocket was headed for the centre of this circle.

The further the spaceship flew away from Earth, the darker the sky became. Finally it turned completely black, like soot or shoe polish. The distant stars sparkled as never before in the black sky. Grishka looked back. Behind him Earth grew smaller and turned into a pale blue ball. It made Grishka sad to look at the blue Earth far, far away. And if anyone had been next to him in the rocket at that moment, he would have felt sorry for Grishka.





GRISHKA LANDS ON THE MOON

Grishka pressed his nose to the porthole and looked down at the Moon. There wasn't a single river or lake or forest, not even a single tree, only grayish yellow stony plains, and mountains on the plains. On Earth the mountains stood in rows, but on the Moon they formed rings, as though they had all got together in a circle to listen to a good story.

The mountains of the Moon reminded Grishka of his own yard: the girls stood in circles too, whispering to each other and giggling, making fun of him. Grishka had gotten a good look at them then, when he was sitting in the attic. "All right, all right," he thought, "I'll show all of you. You go right on laughing – just wait till I get my hands on you."

Now we know that Grishka loved to think up terrible types of revenge. But this time he didn't have time to think of anything:



the rocket had landed on the Moon and he had to climb out. As soon as Grishka set his foot down on lunar soil he slipped and fell on his back. The fall didn't hurt in the least, though – Grishka noticed that he fell sort of slowly. Once on Earth Grishka had been sliding on the icy sidewalk and he fell with such a crash that he saw stars. But on the Moon it didn't hurt at all – you could even say it felt nice.

Grishka turned over on his stomach and looked closely at what was in front of his nose. And he saw that all around the ground was strewn with tiny glassy beads. They were what rolled under the soles of his shoes and made the surface of the Moon slippery.

"Who spread them here?" Grishka wondered. "I'd better be more careful."

But Grishka soon forgot about being careful. He discovered that he could jump as high and as far as the greatest champions on Earth. He jumped easily over broad pits, leaped up onto enormous boulders and – landed in trouble. Once after taking a leap he ended up in a crevice. Fortunately the crevice wasn't too deep, but unfortunately he brushed against a boulder as big as a trunk. It rolled over on top of the crevice, with Grishka inside.





Grishka sat scrunched up in the crevice. The saddest thoughts ran through his head. He remembered his parents – he hadn't even told them where he was going. And it also crossed his mind that now he couldn't return the rocket to the astronaut.

Grishka was sitting in an uncomfortable position and his legs started going to sleep. He tried to straighten them out just a little. He had to press against the bottom of the crevice with his shoes and against the boulder with his helmet. And what a surprise! The boulder slowly rose. Then Grishka pushed it with his hands and it rolled to one side. Grishka could have burst, he was so happy! He was free again! And he had also become strong! No, the astronaut hadn't kidded him. He had fulfilled his promise.

Grishka started to roll the lunar boulder along. It was as easy as rolling an empty barrel, and it didn't make him the least bit tired.

Just then a meteorite – a stone falling down from outer space – hit the lunar soil just before Grishka's nose. It landed with such a crash that the soil heated up and started boiling in an instant, just like water. Even a stream of steam rose up.

That frightened Grishka, and he stopped. If the meteorite had hit his spacesuit, there would have been real trouble. While Grishka was getting himself together after such a fright, something rapped on his helmet. It sounded a little like rain, and that's exactly what it was – lunar rain. Grishka cupped his hands and soon they were filled with those little glassy beads – the same that covered the moon surface. "So that's where those moon beads come from," Grishka figured out. On Earth water evaporates. High in the sky, where it's cold, the water vapour turns into ice crystals, and then it hails. On the Moon the stone evaporated, so when it rained, the rain was made of tiny little stones. On Earth the clouds are enormous, and sometimes the rain comes down from them for a whole week at a time. But here the moon rain lasted only a few seconds.

"I'd better leave," Grishka decided. "Who knows, it might kill me. I'm already stronger. I'll go to an asteroid and get a little stronger. And then it'll be time to head for home."

GRISHKA ON THE ASTEROID

When the rocketship got close to the asteroid, Grishka was amazed: what a tiny planet, only about a mile long and half a mile wide. And it wasn't round, but more like a cucumber. But what was even more amazing, there was a rocket standing on the little planet. Who was inside? Grishka didn't know whether he should be happy or worried. "I'll just have to see," he decided, and brought his rocket down next to the other one.

He climbed out of the spaceship and down the ladder, looking over his shoulder as he went. Next to the other rocket stood someone in a spacesuit holding a coil of rope in his hands. "What does he need the rope for?" Grishka wondered anxiously. "There's something here I don't like."

Grishka jumped down from the last step of the ladder. And as soon as his feet touched the asteroid, he bounced back up and started flying as though he were filled with air. At that moment the stranger swung his arm, lassoed Grishka's leg and tightened the loop. While Grishka was hanging in space over the asteroid the stranger tied the other end of the rope to Grishka's rocket, and then pulled him down. Standing at last on the asteroid, Grishka looked into the face of the stranger's helmet and saw Vanya, of all people!

Grishka was ready for everything, but not that! It was bad enough that that goody-goody Vanya had spoiled things for him on Earth — he had to fly here too! And lasso him besides! No, that was more than Grishka could take. He walked up to Vanya and punched him in the chest. And that very second Vanya and Grishka bounced away from each other like rubber balls, and after doing a somersault, they floated upward. Vanya was also tied to his rocket with a rope. So both boys tumbled about at the end of their ropes like balloons.



"What a dummy you are," Grishka heard via his earphones. "The astronaut sent me here. He forgot to tell you that you shouldn't step out onto the asteroid without tying yourself to the rocket first. While you were on the Moon, I flew straight here. If I hadn't managed to lasso you, you'd be floating through outer space just like a meteorite. On Earth you're used to walking normally – it's big, and the gravity is strong. But this asteroid is so tiny that it can hardly hold objects in place. Here everything is almost weightless. Understand?! You should have figured that out on the Moon. Now watch me, and do what I do."

Vanya began to gather in the rope with his hands. He came down onto the asteroid, found a little crevice between the stones and stuck his foot into it so he wouldn't float away.

Grishka was still floating over the asteroid. For the first time in his life he was ashamed. Here this fellow had hurried to save his life, and he, Grishka, wanted to beat him up. That was really nasty, wasn't it?

So Grishka gave himself a good scolding as he somersaulted around above that tiny little planet. And all around was the deep black space of the universe, strewn with millions of white stars. Also against that black background the disc of the sun burned bright, and the disc of the Moon glowed yellow, and the disc of the Earth gleamed blue.

"Hey, have you fallen asleep?" Grishka heard a familiar voice. "Come on down. Let's play volleyball."

Grishka lowered himself to the surface of the asteroid, also found a crevice for his foot, and got ready to play. True, he couldn't imagine how you could play volleyball here. And besides, there was no ball.

Meanwhile Vanya crawled under an enormous boulder as big as a cupboard and gave it a shove. Turning round and round, very slowly, as though it didn't want to, the boulder floated toward Grishka.

"What weighs ten tons on Earth weighs only a couple of pounds here, so don't be afraid," Vanya yelled on the radio.

Grishka bravely poked at the boulder, his fingers spread wide, and passed it back to Vanya. It certainly was a sight to see!



Next Vanya kicked the boulder like a football player. It tumbled off into outer space, beginning a journey that could take it past the sun, Earth, Moon and the little asteroid-planets. It became a meteorite. Someday it might cross paths with Earth. If that happens at night, people will see a fiery streak in the sky – the trail of the boulder as it glows white-hot and burns up in the atmosphere.

The boys liked making meteorites. They started throwing stones one after the other. And finally, pushing together, they sent a boulder big as a bus tumbling into outer space.

BACK HOME!

Both rockets took off from the asteroid at the same time and headed for Earth. They flew side by side, not overtaking each other or leaving each other behind, just like two friends walking together along a city street or a path through some meadow on earth.

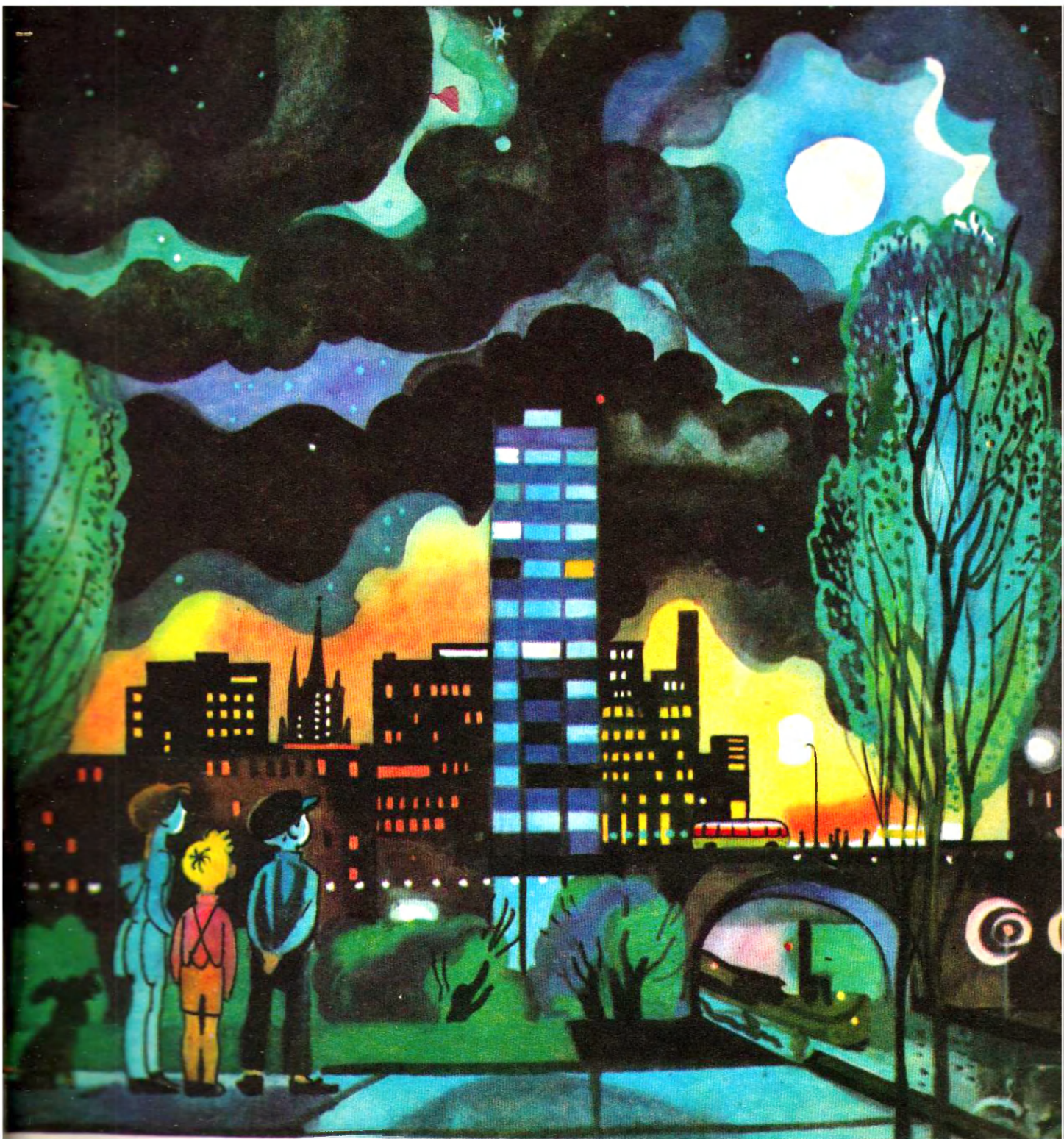
When the rockets reached the halfway point, the astronaut made radio contact with them. He listened to their report about how the flight had gone and about their landing on the Moon and the asteroid, and then he asked if the boys had any questions. Grishka did:

“Will I be as strong on Earth as I was on the asteroid?” That’s what he asked.

“No,” answered the astronaut, “on Earth you’ll be just as strong as you were before. You don’t need to be any stronger to live normally. Now you know yourself that if you have too much strength you can do a lot of harm and injury. You and Vanya could have broken up the whole asteroid into meteorites. You could have destroyed a whole planet, even if it was tiny and uninhabited.”

“Thank you!” Grishka said to the astronaut. And when he got back to Earth, Grishka wasn’t any stronger than he had been, but now he was a lot wiser.





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КОСМОНАВТ И ГРЯНКА
На английском языке

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

English translation © Progress Publishers 1981

М **70632-375** **175-81**
014(01)-81

4803010102